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SUBJECT: ROYG REJECTS HOUTHI CEASEFIRE

REF: SANAA 1532

Classified By: Ambassador Stephen Seche for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (U) The Houthis announced a unilateral ceasefire on the night of August 31, which the ROYG categorically rejected the following day. According to the ceasefire announcement, which Houthi spokesman Muhammad Abd-al-Salam made during a live telephone interview on al-Jazeera's August 31 evening newscast, the Houthis pledged to stop fighting if the government ceased hostilities, reopened roads, and allowed displaced villagers to return to their homes. On September 1, the ROYG's Supreme Security Committee rejected the ceasefire offer and reiterated that the rebels must comply with the government's six conditions in order to end the war (reftel).

12. (SBU) Most observers believe that the ceasefire was an empty gesture that would have no impact on the conflict. Sources report that the fighting continues in Sa'ada and Amran governorates. Abjulmajid al-Fahd, Executive Director of the Civic Democratic Foundation and a native of Sa'ada, told PolOff on September 1 that "just today, there was a huge battle in al-Sahwah," about ten miles southeast of Sa'ada City. Not surprisingly, ruling General People's Congress Spokesman Tariq al-Shami called the initiative a "media stunt" by the rebels, "not a serious initiative to end the war," according to media reports. Nasser al-Rabyee, an independent journalist and Sana'a correspondent for the Dubai-based Gulf News daily, told PolOff on September 1 that he believes that the ceasefire announcement was timed to influence discussion among GCC foreign ministers gathered in Jeddah on September 1. (Note: We understand that the issue of Yemen will be a key part of the GCC agenda. End Note.) He believes that the Houthis were fearful that the GCC countries would rally around the ROYG and announced the ceasefire in order to "confuse" the GCC nations and soften the outcome of their discussions. Murad Zafir, NDI Deputy Director, told PolOff on September 1 that the ceasefire was intended to "embarrass the Yemeni government" domestically. In a context where the Houthis have the upper hand in Sa'ada, while increasingly intense fighting occurs between tribal surrogates in the neighboring governorates of Amran and al-Jawf, the unilateral ceasefire was aimed at showing the Yemeni public that the military "is fighting its own people" in places like Harf Sufyan (Amran governorate).

13. (C) COMMENT. Neither side appears willing to explore serious non-military options to end the fighting in Sa'ada. The Houthis' latest attempt to garner public and international support through announcing a unilateral ceasefire, which required that the ROYG remove all military outposts in Sa'ada, is a no-go option for the government. It was destined for failure, just like the ROYG's six-point plan for peace, which includes conditions -- such as the return of European hostages -- that the Houthis will never be able to meet. END COMMENT.

